DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 375 685 FL 800 821

AUTHOR Novak, Cynthia Cornell; Smith, Julie
TITLE An Immersion Literacy Program for At-Risk ESL Students.
PUB DATE Apr 94
NOTE 42p.; Paper presented at the 4C's Convention (Nashville, TN, April 16-19, 1994).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Academic Failure; *Academic Persistence; Agency Cooperation; College Second Language Programs; *English (Second Language); *Foreign Students; Higher Education; *High Risk Students; *Immersion Programs; *Intensive Language Courses; Intercultural Communication; Liberal Arts; Limited English Speaking; Multicultural Education; Organizational Communication; Program Descriptions; Program Effectiveness; Second Language Instruction; Study Abroad
IDENTIFIERS *Pepperdine University CA

ABSTRACT

An intensive immersion program in English-as-a-Second-Language instruction developed at Pepperdine University (California), a small liberal arts college, is described. The program was designed for limited-English-speaking foreign students who are at risk for academic failure without additional English language skills. Focus of this discussion is the importance of informal learning situations outside the classroom, in addition to classroom interaction, in the effectiveness of language learning. The program was initiated by the college's writing center and a task force that considered academic, social, and philosophical and pedagogical issues related to international students' progress. A comparison is made between the problem-solving process of the task force and the process of coping with the nearby firestorms of November 1993. The pilot program in summer 1989 is described, highlighting lessons learned about the value of informal learning situations. Efforts to enhance this aspect of the program, often by taking advantage of community events not previously scheduled, are illustrated through anecdotes and examined with reference to current language-learning theory. Measures of program success are found in an intercultural festival hosted by international students, increased retention and graduation rates, improved interoffice communication, decreased academic failure rate, and greater interest in study abroad. Contains six references. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

# An Immersion Literacy Program for At-risk ESL Students

by
Cynthia Cornell Novak
Julie Smith

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Cynthia Cornell Novak
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED 375 685

## Introduction

A recent article in the Chronicle of Higher Education cites the following startling statistic: "American colleges enrolled 438,618 foreign students in 1992-93, a 4.5-percent increase over the previous year" (Dec. 1, 1993; A42).

We can agree on quite a few things about these nearly one-half million students. We know, for example, that American colleges draw far more internationals than any other nation; France is a distant second. Furthermore, we know the parts of the world from which these students come: Asia, for example, leads with nearly 60% of the total. We also know that of those who enroll from these nations, approximately 63% are men and 37% are women; about 48% are undergraduates; and business and engineering are the most popular majors (A43).

While we can agree on a number of demographic facts, it is not so easy to agree upon how the language learning needs of these individuals might best be met. The conversation about how we might best teach internationals is of particular importance to those of us who face these students daily and who care deeply about the progress they make.

The Chronicle article cited above focuses on schools which enroll at least 1000 international students; however, the

FL 800821

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

inter-disciplinary/intra-institutional immersion program we will describe today occurs in a school which enrolls only about 250 undergraduate internationals or about 10-12% of our undergraduate student body. Although we represent a small, traditional liberal arts university, we believe that the ideas which we will discuss today have significance for liberal arts schools such as ours as well as larger schools.

Holistic Approach

As we begin our presentation, we invoke the name of Lev Semenovich Vygotsky, a name introduced with increased frequency the past two decades or so, in disciplines as diverse as psychology, education, language acquisition, child development, and composition. In his work Thought and Language, Vygotsky takes to task those who attempt to study psychological structures by analyzing the individual elements rather than the whole.

Early in the book, Vygotsky frames a powerful metaphor about the inter-relationships between thought and language, speculating that atomistic psychological study is like endeavoring to understand the nature of a water droplet by analyzing only its constituent parts --hydrogen and oxygen molecules. He points out that students who study hydrogen molecules and oxygen molecules separately in order to search for an understanding of water--why it puts out fire, for example--are bound to be disappointed since "hydrogen burns and oxygen sustains fire" (4). Vygotsky firmly concludes:

> Psychology winds up in the same kind of dead end when it analyzes verbal thought into its components, thought and word, and studies them in isolation from each other.

> In the course of analysis, the original properties of verbal thought have disappeared. Nothing is left to the investigator but to search out the mechanical interaction of the two elements in the hope of reconstructing, in a purely speculative fashion, the vanished properties of the whole. (4)

We find Vygotsky's metaphor a useful way to introduce our presentation, a presentation we have entitled "An Immersion Literacy Program for At-risk ESL Students." We find Vygotsky's metaphor useful, first of all, as we define the purposes of our presentation. One of our purposes is to illustrate the evolution of our immersion literacy program, describing how it is embedded in a larger social structure; namely, that of a small liberal arts Christian university. Vygotsky is clear in his belief that if one wants real answers, one must pursue a holistic approach. Our program, which is both inter-disciplinary and intra-institutional in nature, purports to be a holistic program, one that has evolved largely because of the initiative of the Composition Faculty and the Writing Center staff. We have used the skills we have long taught students--critical thinking, problem solving, persuasive writing and speaking--to analyze the problems international students encounter on our campus and to figure out how to work with colleagues across the university to effect change.

Many of you may have come to our presentation this afternoon interested, as academics well should be, in learning about the theoretical and curricular base that informs our program. Certainly, one of our purposes today is to discuss theory and practice in detail

as we describe program success. However, we also intend to argue that it is impossible to understand the success of our program separate from the institutional transformation that has accompanied its evolution.

Furthermore, we believe that what we have to say today is of more than local interest. As U.S. colleges and universities move toward the next century--and as we, as academics, move with them in programs designed to meet language needs of increasingly diverse populations--we must learn how to analyze the larger social structure of which our programs are a part and to work with colleagues in departments across our schools to transform institutional policy. Composition and Writing Center faculty are often uniquely trained to make such an analysis and to invite colleagues into useful conversation to bring about sorely needed institutional transformation.

We want to make it clear that to try to separate English Language Institute (ELI) success from the larger social context in which it operates would lead, to borrow Vygotsky's words, "to a dead end," as we tried to speculate about the "vanished properties of the whole."

Vygotsky's metaphor of the water droplet is useful for a second reason as well. It is an effective way to introduce the importance of the inter-relationships present in the immersion model of instruction which we have adopted. We want to state quite emphatically right here at the beginning that, though we target at-risk international students, ELI is not a remedial program. ELI students spend a rigorous seven weeks, studying four or five hours per day, five days

per week in college-level classes for which they earn credit toward graduation.

Necessity of Formal and Informal Learning Opportunities

Unlike many other college-level programs, our immersion model assumes that the process of second language acquisition, including the acquisition of word, speech, concept and thought formation, is best achieved in a social context that pays careful attention to both formal learning and informal learning. Students work in the formal classroom setting on written work which is revised over the course of the term, collected in a portfolio, and assessed by a panel of readers made up of composition faculty.

Our argument today focuses on evidence we have collected which strongly suggests that significant progress in language acquisition is linked not only to formal learning but also to informal learning situations, such as those that occur when students spend time together outside the classroom. In the ELI program, we assess progress in idiomatic English, assessment which occurs through an event we call Country Day, an occasion we will describe in detail a little later.

The evidence we present today had led us to conclude that to neglect either the formal or the informal aspects of language instruction and expect optimum language acquisition is, to change Vygotsky's image a little, like separating hydrogen and oxygen molecules with the expectation that one might still somehow manufacture water.

At the core of our presentation are the stories of human beings who arrive on our campus from around the world. The English

Language Institute boasts students from about 23 nations, most of them anxious at first, many of them away from home for the first time and full of dualities: hesitant to speak but hopeful that someone will approach them and that they will make friends; eyes shifting downward at first when we speak to them but proud and anxious to let us know something about their families and cultures as we show interest; most apprehensive but expectant and courageous and poised nonetheless.

The problems encountered by internationals studying in American universities are similar throughout the nation. Though those we describe today happen to be our students, we believe their experiences are in many ways replicated numerous times in colleges and universities across our nation as internationals acquire a U.S. education.

**Intra-Institutional Struggle and Co-operation**

It was the anguish and despair on the faces of many internationals several years ago that prompted the Comp faculty and the Writing Center (WC) staff to develop the ELI program in the first place. During the mid-eighties, members of the Comp faculty took every opportunity to point out to members of the administration what we believed were significant problems with the system of international student (IS) admission and the academic support or lack thereof once they arrived. At one point, we composed a case study of an IS who had earned 102 credits at our school, a young woman who entered as a Junior the basic English composition course for internationals. I did not question the 102 units that she had

earned in courses mostly in the business division. I wrestled, however, with the fact that she found simple class discussions difficult to follow and that she had considerable difficulty fulfilling the simplest writing assignments-even with the help of the Writing Center staff. Thus, I questioned whether she had the language skills most people would consider necessary to be successful in the business world. She did, by the way, plan to try to obtain a green card, so that she could work in the U.S. following graduation.

The Comp faculty had done its share of memorandum writing to complain about the plight of international students; however, we were not the only ones. Offices across the university complained to the provost; thus, at his behest a Task Force was appointed and a very important series of meetings occurred, a series of meetings which served to transform institutional policy and reposition the Composition faculty with respect to international student policy.

Firestorms

To illustrate the importance of the Task Force and the policy changes which came about as a result of the work of the Task Force, we want to weave a metaphor, using the firestorms which we lived through in Southern California during November 1993. These fires swept across the city of Malibu, coming within feet of our campus buildings and my home in the faculty condominiums. We weave this metaphor advisedly, not at all intending to trivialize the chaos in the more than 55 Pepperdine faculty and student lives who sustained significant loss after the fire.

Having said that, however, we think the fire metaphor is an apt one to use as we describe the process of institutional change. The fire's rapidity, the way it demanded that we reach into the human spirit for modes of cooperation we hadn't thought possible, the way it consumed all other concerns, the ways in which life on campus after it raged through our community--these are the bases of comparison with the important policy meetings we about to describe. The Task Force, out of which ELI grew, had rather the same effect on our ESL student policy as the fire in some ways did on the physical world around our campus. Before we re-enact the fire scene and draw some parallels to the process of institutional change, however, we need to give you just a bit of background.

The point of the first meeting and two subsequent meetings of the Task Force was to determine the perceptions of representatives from different arms of the university toward the state of international student affairs. It is interesting to note that until that first meeting, individuals from across the school who worked daily with internationals had never before met around a table to discuss together relevant issues.

Identifying Key Institutional Issues

I think that some walked toward the first meeting with naivete much like mine, believing that everyone knew there was a crisis, and further firmly believing that the crisis was largely someone else's problem; and finally, very firmly believing someone else ought to fix the problem so the quality of IS life on campus would improve. We want to say, by the way, that we do not intend to convey disloyalty to Pepperdine or to our colleagues who were at the meeting, because

the state of affairs we describe is business as usual at many, if not most, universities. However, it was startling in 1988 to hear professors and staff members voice very different perceptions about the following issues which emerged during the meetings. The following issues were raised:

1. Academic issues (e.g., admission standards, number admitted, academic support, retention and graduation rate)

2. Social issues (e.g., housing, Study Abroad Programs)

3. General issues (e.g., mission statement, "student-centered education," liberal arts education).

Some members of the group expressed concern that those international students who were admitted often appeared underprepared for the rigors of a liberal arts college. To these complaints, others at the meeting responded, many in a genuinely surprised manner, that the admission policy of our university was in line with other schools and that we were "doing as well as others" and "better than in the past." The sense among those who held this more positive view was that there is inherent risk in coming to the U.S. to pursue an undergraduate degree; inevitably, the argument went, some would make it, others would not.

Interestingly, on one point most committee members agreed: the English Department needed to do a better job with basic skills before students were released into upper division classes. Some said that they felt the English Department needed to be--get ready for the "G-word"--the "gatekkeeper." It was something of a shock to learn that I and my English department colleagues were somehow perceived to be largely responsible, if not for the low admissions

standards, at least for those who somehow got through their English requirements and showed up in upper division classes, according to some professors, unprepared to fulfill the assignments. It was a shock both because we do not conceive of our composition classes as service courses to prepare students to write in all disciplines and because, frankly, I attended the meeting, confident that the blame for most of the problems resided in other departments--admissions, for example, because they did not follow a consistent policy; or international student services because they didn't insist that IS arrive on time at the beginning of the term, not did they insist that they attend orientation with other entering students.

A second area of concern focused on social issues, including international student housing. Some questioned why so many international students who desperately needed contact with English were granted permission to live off campus. They pointed out that few domestics were given permission to live off-campus their first two years. To this complaint, committee members who felt we were doing as well as could be expected responded that students who had relatives or sponsors were often allowed to live off campus because dorms were unusually full; furthermore, when internationals lived off campus the number of cross-cultural problems in the dorms diminished.

A third area of concern focused on the apparent unfamiliarity of some internationals with respect to the philosophy of the school, as it related to the conceptual values assumed at a Christian university and also to other topics, such as what it means to obtain a liberal arts education. These arguments were met by some of the

committee members with the refrain that domestic students often arrived with similar haziness. At the conclusion of the first meeting, there was a visible strain and a long awkward silence.

Now let us leave you hanging for just a minute while we go back to November 2 of this year and begin to draw some parallels to the firestorm as we promised we would do. By 1:00 or 1:30 p.m. on that fateful Tuesday in November, what had begun as a thin trail of smoke had increased to what one might describe as billows and clouds, making the sun appear an ominous blood red. As I stood in the faculty parking lot, observing the darkening sky with one of my students, winds gusting around me sixty or more miles per hour, I held in my hand a memorandum I had just received, one which the campus community at large had been issued from our administration advising us not to evacuate--to stay put--to stay off the roads. It was written in a tone meant to convince us that there was no crisis if we stayed calm and stayed on campus, that the campus was the safest place to be since we had survived the 1986 fires and, in fact, had at that time been made the Fire Command headquarters.

As I was reading the memo standing in the faculty parking lot, a helicopter flew just over my head--so close to me, in fact, that I almost crouched, the air from the copter blades blowing grit in my face, the noise making conversation with the student next to me almost impossible. As I held the administrative memo ordering the Pepperdine community to stay put, a man leaned out of the chopper precariously and through the grotesqueness of a megaphone yelled: "Evacuate" "Evacuate." What happened after that is somewhat of a blur. The student to whom I had been talking nervously excused

herself and joined two thousand other students who ignored the memo and listened to the more authoritative voice from the helicopter. Packing up and exiting campus posthaste, the 2000 students took with them their most prized possessions--surfboards, teddy bears, and stereo equipment--not they confessed somewhat sheepishly later--many textbooks and notes.

What I experienced after the first Task Force meeting in which various members of our academic community systematically analyzed perceptions about the state of international student life at Pepperdine was sharply akin to the sense I had at 1:30 p.m. on the Tuesday of the Malibu fires. As I stood in the faculty parking lot the day of the fire day holding the memo in my hand which said, "Do not evacuate" "Stay on campus" while a helicopter flew ominously overhead yelling "Evacuate! Evacuate!", I experienced confusion, indecision, powerlessness, paralysis--those emotions that are often the consequence of being caught in a maelstrom of mixed messages. Like the first Task Force meeting, on the afternoon of the fire, clearly two directions were voiced--two messages with very different meanings both vied to be followed.

Now it turned out that on the day of the fire, the helicopter that flew overhead was two canyons off. The pilot had been told to evacuate people two canyons to the north--Decker Canyon not Malibu Canyon where our campus lies-- but because there was no command center set up yet, when the pilot strayed off course and mistakenly but very successfully evacuated Pepperdine, there was no one to tell him he was off by two canyons.

Like the pilot who didn't have the big picture on the day of the fire, those of us at the first roundtable meeting for international students were only bringing to the meeting a partial picture. Few of us on the faculty side ever communicated with staff offices and vice versa.

Prior to the series of meetings I am describing and prior to ELI, international students were forced into the awkward position of communicating with individual offices: OISS or Office of Student Services handled visa requirements and admissions; RLO or Residential Life issued permission to live off campus; CL or Campus Life handled social concerns such as obtaining permission to be absent from weekly convocation; faculty offices handled individual oral speech and written exams. As they went from office to office to try to solve whatever problems related to their admissions, housing, placement, IS were frequently given conflicting information. It seemed while each office endeavored to do its jobs to the best of ability and budget, it was almost always without the resource of conversation to see what information other offices were dispensing and why.

The fire that devastated Malibu was brought under control on November 6 because all of the personnel in the area cooperated in their systematic endeavor to fight the same fire and put it out, using whatever means were available. They shared information--the person in the command center communicated to the fire chiefs who in turn spoke to squad captains who in turn spoke to the heroes in the field and vice versa-- back again to control unit. There was

precise pinpointing of troublespots--hot spots--as the fire chiefs called them.

Creating A Command Center

We would have fought the Malibu fires with a significantly greater loss of property and life if there had not been a command center. We would certainly still be muddling through with respect to international students if we had not reconvened at a second and third meeting with a sense that we needed to agree to fight the same fire and to do so there needed to be a systematic method of communication-- an agreed upon "Command Center--if you will."

As members of the Comp faculty evaluated the state of affairs after the first meeting of the provost's Task Force, we were wary of assuming the position of Command Center. For very good reasons, the words "command center" make people's faces tighten. People don't want to be in the Command Center if that center functions as a Gatekeeper, in other words if it means taking responsibility for remediating people, bringing them up to speed, and if they don't make it, then keeping them out.

However, not to have assumed responsibility for the Command Center would have doomed us to an equally unattractive alternative: the kind of fragmentation Gerald Graff discusses in his work Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education. Graff says cleverly in that book that when there are conflicts on a college or university campus, academics who are often trained as isolated scholars tend to do their jobs in a vacuum, ignoring to the best of their abilities those whom they perceive to be the enemy. Graff's comments, of course, are directed mainly toward

interdepartmental conflict and toward academe's ineffective presentation of itself to the outside world; however, his comments are meaningful when they are applied to the way in which universities in general deal with overwhelming problems of process and policy.

His barbs are particularly accurate in the way we were handling--or more precisely not handling--the problem of determining cogent educational policy for international students. Graff wisely asserts:

> The poor quality of communication between the academic humanities and the outside world has a lot to do with the poor quality of communication between academic humanists themselves and between sectors of the university in general. If the university is poor at representing itself to the wider student body and to the public, the problem lies not just in its notorious proclivity to jargon. It has a deeper source in institutional practices that isolate teachers from one another and prevent conflicting views from entering into clarifying dialogues. (36)

Thus, believing we could not risk further fragmentation and believing that we needed a Command Center to assure we were fighting the same fire, I walked toward the second meeting armed with a plan devised by the Comp Faculty and the Writing Center, a plan which included a reconceptualization of the idea of Gatekeeper. Instead of thinking of ourselves as Gatekeepers, that is a department that keeps people out, we redefined our role in terms of Command

Center; that is, a department or departments which take responsibility for "the big picture" without losing sight of the progress of individual students.

Birth of the English Language Institute (ELI)

When we reconvened for the second meeting of the Task Force, the Comp faculty and the Writing Center staff had drafted a proposal for a seven-week summer program for at-risk students, defined as those who fell on or just below the stated catalog requirements.

The Committee agreed to pilot test the program. Further, they agreed that instead of making their way from one office to another, Internationals would communicate first with the Office of International Student Services (OISS) and then with the ELI faculty, both of which would oversee IS admission, housing, registration, advising, and orientation during the summer.

After agreeing that the Comp faculty should pilot test ELI, each office agreed to contribute a part to ensure program success: OISS agreed to mail letters to at-risk students; Residential Life (RLO) agreed to insist that ELI students live on campus and so on; Campus Life (CL) agreed to find a way to include IS during orientation. We all agreed to meet periodically to discuss progress.

The Composition faculty left the meeting, having taken the bold and risky step of assuming co-responsibility with OISS as Command Center for at-risk ESL students. It was bold because it forced us as faculty members to sojourn out of the safety of our discipline and out of the four walls of our building and into new territory. As comp faculty we had agreed to enter into collaboration with a staff office. It was risky because we had, as Comp faculty, agreed to invest

considerable time in developing a program that might be a failure in the eyes of the Task Force that would assess the program's worth at the end of the first year. In June 1989, somewhat nervously, we opened our doors to our first 15 students.

**Immersion Model of Instruction**

As we launched ELI 89, we still had many hotspots. One hotspot was the issue of a model to use which brings us to the second part of our presentation--a description of the immersion model--how and why we chose it, how and why it works.

The notion of an immersion program evolved as members of the Comp Faculty and Writing Center staff decided upon the heuristic used by the department of foreign service: to increase language fluency from the present level to the next level, one needs about 225 hours of systematic instruction. Two hundred plus hours of instruction in a language program meant that in a seven-week term we would be with students almost forty hours per week. Obviously, to be in class forty hours per week would be impossible.

Thus, we quickly determined that part of the immersion method had to include informal/out-of-classroom social opportunities structured to assure informal learning. We decided to test the following hypothesis: Informal activities structured as learning situations and built into an academic program contribute positively to overall language acquisition.

Role of Writing Center Staff

We knew that to prove the hypothesis, we would have to provide significant academic support for students outside the

classroom. Thus, a crucial decision at this time involved deputizing the Writing Center (WC) tutors as ELI staff members. Writing Center tutors are carefully selected for their demonstrated ability to work effectively with international clientele in the WC certainly but as importantly, outside the Center, as they assist in field trips and other extra-classroom events. ELI would not be possible without a highly-trained and personable WC staff. Part of the job of the ELI staffer is to invite ELI students to participate in all sorts of conversations in and out of the Center.

To illustrate the importance of the WC staff and the use of the influence of informal instruction on formal acquisition, we begin with a success story from our first ELI, an excursion to Olvera Street, the oldest street in Los Angeles. One of our students, a young man who held dual residency in Mexico and France and who spoke Spanish and French fluently and English almost as easily, was struggling early in the term to fulfill the rigorous written assignments required in ELI classes. The more serious ELI students ignored him in class at the beginning of the summer because of what they sensed was a cavalier attitude; however, on this field trip, his ELI fate changed.

As we toured Olvera Street, one of the ELI staff members was instrumental in urging Chris, our ELI student, to offer explanations of cultural artifacts we found in the stalls that line the streets. At dinner, our ELI student assumed a sort of host position, ordering in Spanish and delighting all of the group with stories from Spanish history. His conviviality, which had been perceived as arrogance and silliness and thus had ostracized him in the class situation, was seen in a new light as we ate enchiladas together in the oldest building in

Los Angeles, a hacienda-turned-restaurant. In short, after this excursion, this student assumed a new position in the group, a consequence which we believe helped him through the tough transition to Pepperdine and onto graduation in four years.

Incidental and Intentional Learning

Stories such as this one will recur through our presentation because they illustrate the necessary balance between what Harvard professor Catherine E. Snow calls "incidental" and "intentional" learning. Snow defines incidental learning as that which occurs naturally as one negotiates meaning in everyday life. Intentional learning,on the other hand, is that which we most often associate with formal instruction, that for which we must develop metalinguistic awareness. Our goal in ELI, in balancing the formal and informal, is to teach students to bring metalinguistic awareness into the daily-ness of their lives.

PREPARE VIDEO CLIP

Video Clip Introduction

To illustrate formal and informal learning or intentional and incidental learning, we want to show you a short clip from a video we made to celebrate an ELI group two years ago, a video which we now use as a recruiting tape. On the video, listen for the ways in which the concepts of formal and informal learning are brought together by contrasting the student's high expectations about academic achievement with their almost non-existent understanding of the effect of their social interactions on their academic achievement.

You will see on this video some of the activities we have engaged in over the past few summers. The beginning of the clip illustrates the central role the WC staff takes the very first day of the term. We have begun to see the value of doing what some have called "de-centering" the Writing Center, finding ways to go outside our four walls and into environments which enrich and strengthen the language experience. We conceive of our WC as the center of a circle of language experience. Thus, our tutors, who are central to the success of ELI as well as the success of the Writing Center, really work to widen the circumference of the language experience circle when they go out from the WC as companions and guides to our newly-arrived students. Our tutors shepherd the students around campus to take care of photo IDs, registration, and other paper work as well as learning names, engaging students in conversation, and teaching them their way around campus. You will see our tutors introducing themselves to some new students along with quick shots of Dodger Stadium and other activities which we will develop more

fully in our presentation. Again, let me say that these activities should not be construed as the focus of the ELI program. Our academic expectations are rigorous; however, we feel that we can further aid students' language development by exploiting every opportunity we have to help them make those vital connections between thought and language.

**(Show Video)**

**Formal and Informal Learning Elaborated**

While we are working to increase our student's familiarity with idiomatic English, it is really formal academic learning that is probably the most important goal to the international student studying in America. The ELI program recognizes this goal and affirms its importance; however, we also recognize that much of the language learning which is key to academic achievement does not necessarily take place in a formal classroom setting. The recognition of the complementary relationship between formal and informal learning is something we have tried to explore and capitalize upon as we continue to refine our curriculum. Our successes and failures in drawing formal and informal learning together tell the story of our development and inform our decisions as we put together the ELI program anew each summer.

The socialization of international students is taken very seriously by the ELI staff. As a staff, we have discussed repeatedly the idea that the ELI "classroom" has no walls and that our field trips, mealtimes, and discussions between classes probably do more to get students to practice colloquial English than all of the papers and class

projects we assign them. So we have made a conscious effort to bridge the gap between in-classroom and out-of-classroom work. Each summer, faculty and staff plan their coursework so that class discussion topics, papers, and other projects incorporate field work which students are expected to do on field trips or at social functions.

One of the ways we see the connections between thought and language at work in ELI is illustrated by tracing the rather tortuous path that ideas discussed formally in class take on their way to becoming a metalinguistic part of our students' development. Last summer, for example, we got a lot of classroom mileage out of a production of Streetcar Named Desire which was being performed locally. Before attending the play, the students were required to read it as a part of their coursework for both their English and American Culture classes and write responses to their reading in their journals. The American Culture class then spent an entire class period doing a reader's theatre presentation of scenes from the play, during which the readers would stop for small group discussion of character and plot development along with some discussion of the milieu of the American south in which the play was set. With this as background, the students went to see the play in its entirety.

For the rest of the semester, the effect of this play on the students could be seen woven into the fabric of much of their writing and critical thinking. Stanley and Blanche and Stella began to show up with amazing frequency in their journals, in their comments in class as they strove to make analogies in the English language, and sometimes in their casual conversations. Let me illustrate with this example: as our students struggled to understand the unspoken

social rules of appropriate behavior toward the opposite sex in American culture, we observed their finding an innovative use for Stanley, Blanche, and Stella. Some of our male students had begun to exhibit some inappropriately aggressive behavior toward female students--both American and international. This behavior ranged from mildly offensive and mostly juvenile (one student introduced himself to an American girl by saying, "Hi. Are you a virgin?") to potentially problematic physical aggressiveness. Because we are learning to look for ways to capitalize on our students' out-of-class experiences and bring them into the classroom so that our conversations span the linguistic spectrum they are bound to encounter in their college careers, we decided to use some class time to discuss the school's policy on sexual harassment and spend some discussion time on appropriate gender behavior. Two of our staff members, one male and one female, put together a seminar on this topic in which the students themselves brought up Stanley as a model of the kind of behavior to avoid. In fact, all of the unhealthy relationships in Streetcar made a pretty good springboard for discussion of this topic. The discussion also centered around the nuances of language (both verbal and body language for which Blanche DuBois, in the interpretation of the play we saw, was a virtual goldmine)--and the speaker's responsibility to clearly state his or her meaning in gender-related situations--and everyone's responsibility to respect the speaker's wishes (i.e. No Means No). The instructors role-played appropriate and inappropriate behavior, and then the students participated by suggesting social situations and role playing through these incidents themselves. One of the most

successful of these occured when one woman took on the role of aggressor on the dance floor and a man took on the role of "the victim." This particular woman got so aggressive that the male student became uncomfortable enough to step outside the make believe and ask the instructors whether he had to keep on responding to her repeated attempts. The effect on the students was immediate and far-reaching. Some of the students figured out immediately what had precipitated the seminar, and they were openly grateful for the information. A few days later, we heard that some of the male students had made it a point to apologize to one of the women who had been the recipient of some of the inappropriate behavior.

The social context for learning set up by the ELI program plays a significant part in the following analysis of this situation. The setting in which the male students made their apologies was the dorm--actually, they figured out which dormroom window was her's and used that time-honored channel of communication with co-eds to make their apologies through. One of the requirements for enrollment in ELI is that the students must live in the dorm because the socialization that takes place in that setting, along with the possibilities for spoken negotiation with roommates, etc., facilitates further language learning. The dorm--and this dormroom window in particular--illustrates both physically and metaphorically one way in which the window of opportunity for building language skill is widened by requiring that the students live on campus.

Further, the way in which the situation was played out also illustrates an idea which Vygotsky first described in the book we

referred to earlier, Thought & Language. His theory describes the evolution of language such that speech which appears first on the social, or inter-psychological plane, shows up later in the person's own mind, or intra-psychological plane, and then finally goes "underground" where it simmers for a while before it is fully ready for conscious use. Later, this language appears on the conscious level transformed by the student's other experiences and perceptions. Thus, we argue that even when students think things out in their own fashion, the words and ideas they use are most often drawn from a social context--present or past--so that both the individual and the community or society always exist in the shadows of the conversation--whether that conversation takes place on the social plane or on the inner plane of one's thoughts. As the class assignment to read Streetcar Named Desire illustrates, formal and informal language lessons build upon each other and, as Vygotsky suggests, often have rather serendipitous effects. The many ways in which this play became a part of various conversations shows how our students fashioned some of their ideas from inner speech which became externalized as it became necessary to express these ideas and act upon them. It is clear to us in retrospect, because of this situation and dozens of others that are less dramatic, that our efforts at combining formal and informal learning were, on the whole, successful--and largely responsible for helping students bridge the cultural and social gaps which they often confront when living in a foreign country.

We have begun to make a point to watch for these serendipities as part of our success in ELI relies on seizing the

moment--whenever that moment occurs--to teach lessons about the English language. We encourage all staff members to be aware that teaching opportunities come in all forms and at all hours of the day--and sometimes all hours of the night. Take, for example, one of the social exchanges that took place during last summer's ELI program. One of the first trips the students and staff took together was to Dodger Stadium on the Fourth of July. Most of the students had been in the states only a few days at that point, so they were at that early, uneasy point in learning to function in a new culture when the duality of their desires is readily apparent: they want to speak and be involved but are unsure and afraid to make mistakes.

Among our student population, we had nine Russian students whom we had accepted conditionally because Russia was not set up to administer the TOEFL. Consequently, we had no real idea of the level of English these students had attained. We were further alarmed by the fact that the group relied heavily on one fellow Russian student to communicate in English for the entire group. The Dodger game itself was not of overwhelming interest to our students, but they endured patiently and passed the time by doing the wave and buying everything in sight, from Dodger Dogs and nachos drizzled with plastic sauce to souvenir clothing and baseballs. Afterwards, they were sufficiently impressed by the fireworks display if not the background music which (with apologies to our gracious host city, Nashville) tended heavily toward country and western whining. (I have earned the right to say this because I have spent a lot of time in Texas where country and western music is de rigeur.) Then came the long and eventful bus ride home--long

because we spent most the time getting out of the Dodger Stadium parking lot along with the rest of the sold-out crowd and eventful because the bus broke down just after midnight on Pacific Coast Highway.

As we set out, the students were sleepy and uncommunicative, so our efforts at conversation were not meeting with much success. One of the staff began asking a Russian student about the Russian language, and they got on the topic of how plurals are assigned. As it turns out, this aspect of Russian grammar is quite complicated, and explaining it in English took the combined efforts of all the Russian students who were suddenly quite animated and began arguing among themselves as to the best way to explain it. The other students--mostly Asians and Europeans --suddenly began interacting cross-culturally to try to help the Russians explain by suggesting English words to express the concepts. This informal situation not only got reticent speakers involved in English-speaking but also formed the basis for a conversation about Russian grammar which continued all semester. In addition, it effectively introduced an awareness of language and some possible bridges to understanding into the minds of all involved.

Another positive result of the social immersion process inherent in our program was observed by one of our staff members, Mark Werdin, who pointed out that in social situations, students not only "get more exposure to real-world English, but they [also] have chances to prove themselves in different ways" than they do in the classroom. Mark had tentatively suggested to a few of the students a trip to the ice rink for some skating. The idea was so enthusiastically

received that he had to come up with some extra last-minute transportation. Mark reported a definite shift in the dynamics of the group who went skating that night which reached beyond the immediate social situation and into the some of the students' concepts of themselves as English speakers. As it turned out, some of the students who were struggling the hardest in the classroom were very skillful iceskaters, whereas some of the students who had fewer problems in the classroom wobbled tentatively along on the ice. This activity reminded the strugglers that they were capable of achievement and that it takes practice to become competent at almost anything. The struggling students relaxed and became much more communicative after participating in something which rebuilt their confidence. Our staff member's acknowledgment of these students' abilities highlighted for them their strengths which lent them a psychological edge that had been missing before. The nature of the relationship here between formal and informal learning is more abstract but is a valuable part of international student progress. The results of this psychological boost to the student's self-esteem were observable in more formal ways in the classroom in the form of a student's willingness to take more risks with the language. In addition, others began to see these students in a different way. Suddenly, they were experts with strengths in an area which could be examined and discussed. Their expertise made them more approachable and opened them up to more types and topics of conversation both with their peers and their instructors.

As a staff, we are still exploring the connection between the formal and informal elements of our program. As the program

evolves from summer to summer, we have begun to recognize that just as the formal is enhanced by the informal, the opposite is also true. And when the formal element is missing from our overall plan, there seem to be fewer positive repercussions on the students' learning. One of our trips last summer is a case in point. We spent a good portion of our activity budget taking the students on an overnight trip to an upscale beach resort hotel which fronted the ocean. Our thinking was that this trip would be a stress reliever for the students--all of whom had been working hard at learning and living in a new culture while working up a writing portfolio of 8,000 words along with several formal speeches and at least one research paper. Our time was not structured around anything (except mealtimes), and the students felt at loose ends even though they could go to the beach or play volleyball or do any one of a number of other activities.

As we think about the relative flatness of this experience as compared to the experience of attending Streetcar Named Desire, it occurs to us that there is a tension between structured time and leisure time that we must constantly work out in our lives. The students had rightly come to expect that the trips we took had some clear connection with the academic program. In the case of the beach resort, we had not made formal plans intercut with informal activities. And while we don't think that this trip was a total failure because there were some valuable social interactions, we did feel that better planning and more intentional interaction between structure and leisure would have been more beneficial as well as providing a more fulfilling experience for the students. The language

that the formal classroom setting allows them to use in a structured environment to voice connections between their experiences and, say, their reading is perhaps the most important element in their own perception of academic progress.

Because of the disappointing (not to mention expensive) outcome of our beach resort trip, this coming summer we are planning a different type of trip. This time, our trip will have more elaborate planning and less elaborate accommodations. We are going to explore Catalina Island to conduct some field work which will be necessary to complete writing projects which focus on the environment. While the fieldwork will not be overly laborious, we think the structured time will provide the contrast that is often needed to appreciate leisure and make it more meaningful.

The stories that we've chosen to use as examples are just a few out of many that happen each summer. As we examine our students' progress at the end of each sumer, our findings support Shirley Brice-Heath's contention, in her book Ways With Words. In that work, she argues that most people develop only as much literacy as they need to succeed and negotiate meaning in their daily lives. Our plans for future ELI sessions are already taking shape around that very claim: the most effective way to facilitate student language acquisition and to meet the felt need of the student for sure signs of academic progress is to consciously put together formal and informal experiences which build upon and enhance one another--experiences which require that students expand their language base by succeeding in a variety of ways to negotiate meaning in their daily lives.

**Spolsky's Theoretical Model**

We have worked inductively this afternoon on our way to a discussion of the theoretical model that underlies our program. As the Comp faculty and WC staff conceptualized the ELI curriculum, we asked a question similar to that which Bernard Spolsky asks in the introduction to his 1989 Oxford University Press release entitled Conditions For Second Language Learning. Spolsky's question and ours as well is this:

"Who learns how much of what language under what conditions?" (7)

Spolsky admits that his question and the theory that grows out of it are "unabashedly immodest" in their comprehensive nature. "Unabashedly immodest" or not, we were intrigued because he attempts to capture a testable model which integrates social context, cognitive and linguistic theory, and individual learner differences.

Spolsky makes this claim about his theory:

> . . . each of the parts (of the theory). . . make a difference to the result: if any one is absent, there can be no learning, and the greater any one is, the greater the amount of learning. . . . The special interest . . . is that it is applicable not just to the macrolevel, the development of larger levels of proficiency . . . but also to the microlevel, the learning of single items. (15)

To understand the interactive nature of the model, we thought it would be useful to discuss it briefly. First, in Spolsky's model social context is of fundamental importance. In fact, Spolsky posits social context as the key influence in developing various learner

attitudes such as the attitude of the learner toward the community speaking the language. In our case, that would include the learner's attitude toward other ELI participants, the ELI staff, and the university at large. Spolsky then argues that attitudes affect motivation; motivation, in turn, interacts with individual differences to affect the advantage learners take of the learning opportunities they are given.

Social context is also important in determining the learning situations themselves--both formal and informal--and the interaction between learner and situation. This interplay or interaction, of course, involves both the learner and the teacher, and in our case, WC tutors as well. As a result of the interaction between the learner, the situation, and the staff member, Spolsky would argue-- and we concur and have illustrated in our previous examples--that various outcomes occur, outcomes which are both linguistic and non-linguistic in nature (27).

**Vygotsky and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)**

It is at this point that we see a very useful connection between Spolsky's model and the theory of language Vygotsky advocates in his book Thought and Language which we have mentioned a couple of times.

Central to Vygotsky's language theory is the word which Vygotsky posits as the primary unit of study. In his view, the skilled teacher significantly influences the students' language development through choice of words, conversations, and assignments which occur, as we described earlier, first on the social or inter-psychological

plane and then are transferred to the inner plane of one's mind or the intra-psychological plane and finally go underground to become part of the student's own thought.

Vygotsky's term, often used lately in education and psychology circles-- the "zone of proximal development" or ZPD is a useful term. It is useful because it captures the way in which the insightful teacher uses cues in the social context to stay in touch with what the student can do just beyond that student's grasp or just beyond what that student can accomplish alone--always helping to push the envelope of the student's ability. The ZPD is crucial in second language acquisition. In ELI, for example, the teacher and the WC staff members keep a careful eye and ear on the learners, their conversations and experiences. As they deem it necessary--in and out of the classroom--ELI faculty and staff provide language scaffolds, if you will, to encourage students to elaborate and define their ideas.

We believe Spolsky's holistic model as well as Vygotsky's notion of the ZPD are both well illustrated in our next video clip for which you need a little background. Every summer the ELI students plan one of the weekend activities, sometimes ending up at my house for pizza or dessert. This particular group voted, much to my horror, to go bowling. I relented when they made a persuasive case that some had never bowled before and one in the group was a champion bowler in Korea, a young man who seemed particularly anxious to use his expertise to teach, and we suspect, to impress the novices.

Up to this time in the ELI program, we had been frustrated because some of the Asian women particularly had appeared very

hesitant to speak more than a word or two. Since we knew that we would be at my house for a couple hours, we had, in desperation, rented three videos because we feared that we might be in for a quiet evening with long silences and need some structure. On the way home from bowling, the young women asked if they could stop briefly at the grocery store because they had heard someone describe Klondike bars, and they wanted to try some. We stopped to get some and then proceeded to my house where the students ate pizza and listened to numerous CD's, and chatted congenially with WC staff and even the van drivers who had joined in the fun.

One of our ELI WC staff members picked up the camera when he saw this scene building. As the young women began to eat their Klondike bars, they tried to figure out how to learn the childhood refrain "I scream, you scream, we all scream for ice cream." While this may seem like a frivolous clip, we think it illustrates well that while this refrain is a cliche for the native speaker, it is unfamiliar for the second language learner. You will notice in the clip that at one point the camera becomes wobbly. This is not a home movie problem. The staff member, a gifted film student in USC's prestigious film school has a steady hand with a camera; however, as he worked with the young women, his reflex was to move the camera away from his eye so that he could gain direct eye contact with the young women to better explain the refrain. As you will see, they got continually stuck on the "we all scream," thinking it was their cue to make lots of noise.

We highlight this clip because we think it illustrates well that it takes the prompting of the staff member working in the ZPD and the

safety of the informal learning situation to provide the context for the necessary repetition and practice on the social plane before the students are able to produce an approximation of the refrain. The type of interaction you see here, interaction which only took a couple of minutes to transpire, is repeated numerous times every summer. Fortunately, it usually occurs around more serious subjects; however, serious or not, encounters such as this account for the success of the ELI program--success measured in terms of linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes.

**Outcome Measures of Success**

ELI staff members are currently systematically studying outcomes which measure program success. Thus far, we have isolated four key outcome variables:

- Country Day
- Retention and graduation rates
- Study Abroad Programs
- Credits Committee

Country Day

The first measure we want to highlight is an event we call "Festival of Countries" or "Country Day." Country Day is a special day set aside for international students to become hosts at an event during which they share aspects of their native cultures with an audience drawn from the larger academic community of our university. Faculty and staff members are invited via a flyer which is placed in offices around campus several days prior to Country Day.

All of the students prepare presentations, the information for which is acquired through visits to their local embassies. At the embassies, they gather demographic data and brochures; borrow everything from slides to flags and audio-visual materials; and sometimes arrange to have guest speakers come to Country Day to deliver a brief speech on an interesting aspect of their culture. One year, for example, the Consulate General from Germany came to Pepperdine to discuss economic and social changes in Germany effected by the fall of the Berlin Wall and communism. In addition to their presentations, students must plan and collaborate with

others to prepare a simple dish from their country or region, dishes which are served buffet style to members of the audience after the formal speeches.

In the presentation portion of the event, we assess each student's command of English--the basic ability of each ELI student to make him/herself understood. The video clip we are about to show illustrates some of the aspects of language acquisition which we look for when assessing a student's progress in using informal English effectively. As the students make their presentations, watch how they work out the complexities of translating thought into speech on a level which is meaningful and at the same time incorporates such rhetorical tenets as consideration of audience. One of the German students you will see relates an anecdote which is potentially offensive to his American audience because its centerpiece is an ignorant question posed by an American. Because of the absurdity of the American's query, Marco starts to make a comment but then stops himself and repairs his speech in mid-sentence in consideration of his American audience. Please note also in the speech of the Thai student the way in which he responds to the laughter in the audience when they discover that he himself figures prominently in one of the slides . His ad lib is remarkable because it shows his sensitivity to audience response as well as his own use of colloquial English. Keep in mind as you watch this portion of the video that this Thai student came to the ELI program with minimal skills and at first participated very rarely in discussions. Through his interactions in and outside the classroom, he reveals

remarkable progress in developing a comfort zone in which to speak and repair speech freely.

Retention and Graduation

We have increased our retention and graduation rate of international students every year since ELI's introduction. Furthermore, our office of Institutional Research is currently gathering some comparative data which suggest that ELI students have perhaps as much as a 10% higher Retention and Graduation rate than domestics and a 13% higher rate than other International students; however, we are apprehensive about committing these figures to paper until we do some more checking. The point is that we are doing well in the area of retention and graduation, especially considering that we begin with an at-risk population.

Inter-office Communication

Another area that we count as a success is that inter-office communication has increased, which is to say that those who address international student problems keep one another better informed than in the past. At least twice per year, representatives from all offices on campus that address international student problems meet around a table to discuss how to serve the students better, how to co-operate more effectively and thus how to improve the quality of life and the probability of success for internationals on our campus. This change has increased the flow of communication between staff and faculty.

Credits Committee

In the past, the percentage of international students appearing before the Academic Credits Committee approached 23%. This committee reviews academic progress and determines whether students should be placed on academic probation or, in some cases, dismissed from school. Since 1989 when the English Language Institute was formed, the percentage of internationals students appearing before the Crèdits Committee has dropped to 9%, a percentage that reflects the number of internationals in the undergraduate student population.

Study Abroad Programs

Pepperdine University boasts Study Abroad Programs in Heidelberg, Germany; London, England; and Florence, Italy. Prior to 1989, the number of international students applying for and being accepted into Study Abroad Programs was quite small. Currently, the Office of Study Abroad Programs tells us that each year an increasing number of internationals expresses interest in and follows through with applications for Study Abroad Programs.

**Conclusion:**

We know that our audience is comprised of academics who have been trained in composition, rhetoric, and literature; thus, we feel certain that it has not been lost on you that we started our presentation with an image of water, and then moved to images of fire and water. Because our educations have sensitized us to the importance of unity, we will all sleep better tonight if we bring our initial images full circle. In fact, rains in Southern California have

turned the fire-charred hills green again. However, our colleagues in the Natural Science Division who study the chaparral tell us that we can expect fires again in a few years, that fires are, in fact, an inevitable part of the life cycle in Southern California.

Likewise, ELI shows signs of life as we gear up for a sixth summer. We have already met in one of semi-annual meetings with colleagues in offices across the university to discuss the efficacy of current IS student policy. We have come to expect challenges and problems at those meetings, accepting them as an inevitable part of the academic terrain. However, we face these challenges now with hope rather than despair, because we have learned from five successful years, that there is a functional wholeness to our program. It is functional and whole because the program fits the structure and rhythm of our university, having evolved out of collaborative institutional policy change. It is also functional and whole because it approaches language acquisition from multiple perspectives, preparing international students to assume their place as liberally-educated adults in the 21st century.

## Works Cited

Desruisseaux, Paul. "A Foreign-Student Record." The Chronicle of Higher Education (December 1, 1993): A42-43.

Graff, Gerald. Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education. New York: W.W. Norton, 1992.

Heath, Shirley Brice. Ways With Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983.

Snow, Catherine E. "Beyond Conversation: Second Language Learners' Acquisition of Description and Explanation." Research in Second Language Learning: Focus On the Classroom. Ed. James P. Lantolf and Angela Labarca. Norwood, N.J. : Ablex, 1987.

Spolsky, Bernard. Conditions For Second Language Learning. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Vygotsky, Lev. Thought and Language. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987.